

Message Text

SECRET

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12

ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2164

INFO DIA WASH DC

CINCEUR

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

S E C R E T TEL AVIV 4653

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IS, LE

SUBJECT: MINDEF PERES' VIEWS ON LEBANON

1. DURING JULY 6 MEETING WITH AMBASSADOR TOON, MINISTER OF DEFENSE PERES WAS ASKED TO GIVE HIS VIEWS ON THE LEBANESE SITUATION. HE BEGAN BY STATING THAT KEY TO UNDERSTANDING LEBANESE SITUATION IS ANSWER TO BASIC QUESTION - "WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE SYRIAN INTERVENTION?" PERES ADVANCED TWO POSSIBLE ANSWERS. FIRST WAS HISTORIC SYRIAN DREAM OF A RE-ESTABLISHED "GREATER SYRIA," BUT PERES FELT THAT THIS MOTIVE WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER SERVED BY SYRIAN INTERVENTION ON THE SIDE OF THE MUSLIMS. ACTUAL INTERVENTION ON SIDE OF CHRISTIANS LEADS PERES TO FAVOR EXPLANATION THAT ASSAD FELT EXTREMELY HARD PRESSED BETWEEN A HOSTILE IRAQI BA'ATH PARTY AND HOSTILE JUMBLATT AND PLO FORCES IN LEBANON.

2. PERES SEES ASSAD AS RELUCTANT TO USE ENOUGH MILITARY FORCE TO STABILIZE THE SITUATION. HE CLAIMED THAT SYRIAN FORCES ARE NO LONGER INTERVENING BETWEEN

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MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN FORCES. ISRAEL FEELS THAT SYRIAN

FORCES ARE RETREATING TO BEKAA VALLEY WHERE THEY ARE CONSOLIDATING THEIR HOLD. PERES SUGGESTED THAT ASSAD IS REACTING TO, RATHER THAN STOPING, EVENTS IN LEBANON. HE POINTED OUT THAT ORIGINALLY IT APPEARED THAT SYRIAN MILITARY MOVES SUPPORTED ITS POLITICAL AIMS BUT THAT NOW ASSAD SEEMS TO BE REVISING HIS POLITICAL AIMS AS THE MILITARY SITUATION CHANGES.

3. PERES CLAIMS THAT IN LAST FEW DAYS, SYRIAN FORCES HAVE REMOVED AGGM BOUNDARY MARKERS DELINEATING THE BORDER BETWEEN SYRIAN AND THE BEKAA REGION OF LEBANON. HE SEES SYRIAN ANNEXATION OF THE BEKAA AS A POSSIBILITY. THIS LED HIM TO OPINE THAT, FROM ISRAEL'S POINT OF VIEW, A SYRIAN TAKE-OVER OF LEBANON WOULD BE PREFERABLE TO A JUMBLATT,PLO TAKE-OVER. HE STRESSED, HOWEVER, THAT THESE WERE NOT THE ONLY TWO ALTERNATIVES. HE STILL SEES A UNITED AND INDEPENDENT LEBANON AS POSSIBLE, PARTICULARLY IF THE SONS OF CHAMOUN AND JEMIYAL CAN GET TOGETHER AND LEAD THE CHRISTIANS.

4. TURNING TO WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS RECENT SYRIAN HINTS THAT FURTHER SYRIAN/ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS MAY BE POSSIBLE, PERES FELT THAT ISRAEL SHOULD TAKE THEM SERIOUSLY. HIS MOOD SEEMED TO BE QUITE UPBEAT.

5. FINALLY, PERES COVERED A POTPOURRI OF MILITARY RELATED TOPICS. HE ASSERTED THAT EGYPT IS SUPPLYING LARGE QUANTITIES OF ARMS AND AMMUNITION TO THE PLO IN LEBANON. HE FEELS THIS POLICY IS MISTAKEN AND SHORT-SIGHTED BUT SEES IT AS INSPIRED BY EGYPTIAN HATRED OF SYRIA. PERES CLAIMS THAT IDF NAVY, IN ANSWER TO A DISTRESS CALL, TOWED A DISABLED GREEK FREIGHTER INTO HAIFA HARBOR FOR REPAIRS. CARGO WAS SHIPMENT OF ARMS CONSIGNDED TO PLO IN TYRE. ACCORDING TO CREW, AN EGYPTIAN GENERAL SUPERVISED ONLOAD IN ALEXANDRIA.

6. CHRISTIAN FORCES IN LEBANON ARE FACING SHORTAGES OF ARMS AND AMMO, ACCORDING TO PERES, WHILE MUSLIMS ARE IN GOOD SHAPE. HE CLAIMED THAT MUSLIMS HAVE AN UNLIMITED SUPPLY OF MEDIUM RANGE ANTI-TANK PRG'S, FOR EXAMPLE.

7. FINALLY, PERES PROVIDED SOME INFORMATION ON EARLY SYRIAN SECRET

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FIGHTING WHICH WAS NEW TO US. HE CLAIMED THAT VANGUARD OF SYRIAN FORCES GIVEN HEROES' WLCOME IN SIDON AND TRIPOLI AND WERE THEN AMBUSHED, TAKING HEAVY CASUALTIES. HE ALSO CLAIMED THAT IN EARLY DAYS OF SYRIAN INTERVENTION, THERE WERE CLASHES BETWEEN SYRIAN AND IRAQI FORCES IN THE TRIPOLI AREA, RESULTING IN THE WITHDRAWAL OF SYRIAN FORCES FROM THE VICINITY OF TRIPOLI.

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